

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY CARACAS IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY PANAMA

C O N F I D E N T I A L USUN 3107

EXDIS

CARACAS FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY LEWIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PN, US

SUBJECT: GOVERNOR SCRANTON'S MEETING WITH PANAMANIAN FOREIGN
MINISTER BOYD

REFS: A) STATE 192535 B) STATE 191274 C) STATE 191277
D) STATE 191067 E) STATE 190452

1. ON AUGUST 4, GOVERNOR SCRANTON AND AMBASSADOR BENNETT MET WITH PANAMANIAN FONMIN BOYD AND PERM REP ILLUECA. BOYD EMPHASIZED HIS BELIEF IN THE NECESSITY OF KEEPING COMMUNICATIONS OPEN BETWEEN PANAMA AND THE UNITED STATES AND HIS PERCEPTION OF THE MANY COMMON INTERESTS WHICH UNITE US, PARTICULARLY THIS YEAR WHEN, HE STRESSED, WE HOPE TO FINALIZE A NEW TREATY. HE DESCRIBED IN ENTHUSIASTIC TERMS HIS MEETING WITH THE SECRETARY IN SANTIAGO AND CHARACTERIZED DEVELOPMENTS THERE RELATED TO PANAMA AS VERY POSITIVE.

2. COMMENTING THAT GOV. REAGAN MIGHT, PERHAPS, HAVE DONE PANAMA A FAVOR BY BRINGING THE CANAL ISSUE UP, BOYD SAID THAT FOLLOWING THE EXPECTED NOMINATION OF PRESIDENT FORD IN MID-AUGUST, BOTH MAJOR CANDIDATES WILL BE ON RECORD AS FAVORING A NEW CANAL TREATY; AND HE BELIEVES A MORE ACTIVE CAMPAIGN TO EDUCATE US PUBLIC OPINION ON THE CANAL ISSUE IS NEEDED. HE SAID HE
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IS CONSIDERING THE INTRODUCTION OF AN ITEM IN THE 31ST GA

ENTITLED, "THE PANAMA CANAL QUESTION". HE THEN DESCRIBED THE 1973 SECURITY COUNCIL SESSION IN PANAMA AS HAVING TURNED OUT "BEAUTIFULLY" DESPITE PREDICTIONS OF US OFFICIALS TO THE CONTRARY.

3. GOV. SCRANTON EMPHASIZED TO BOYD THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PANAMA CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS TO US, PRESIDENT FORD AND SECRETARY KISSINGER'S COMMITMENT TO ARRIVING AT A MUTUALLY SATISFACTORY TREATY, AND HIS OWN PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO ACHIEVE SUCH A TREATY. HE POINTED OUT, HOWEVER, THE ACUTE DIFFICULTY OF THIS MATTER IN AN ELECTION YEAR AND EMPHASIZED REPEATEDLY THE DAMAGE WHICH ATTACKS ON THE US IN COLOMBO OR IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY WOULD HAVE ON AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION AND ON PROGRESS TOWARDS A TREATY. HE SAID THAT HE WOULD BE FORCED TO REPLY IN VERY STRONG TERMS IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY TO ANY ATTACK ON THE US RELATED TO THE CANAL NEGOTIATIONS PRIOR TO THE ELECTIONS AND THAT THIS WOULD GENERATE A VERY STRONG REACTION IN THE UNITED STATES. HE POINTED OUT THAT EVEN IF REAGAN IS NOT NOMINATED, THERE IS A STRONG GROUP IN THE US OPPOSED TO A NEW TREATY WHO COULD CAUSE REAL PROBLEMS.

4. GOV. SCRANTON REQUESTED THAT BOYD EXERCISE HIS INFLUENCE TO OBTAIN LANGUAGE IN COLOMBO ALONG THE LINES OF THAT USED IN THE OAS GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND TO KEEP THE ISSUE OUT OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY. HE TOLD BOYD AGAIN HOW IMPORTANT THE QUESTION OF TIMING IS IN ANY PANAMANIAN EFFORT TO BRING THE ISSUE BEFORE THE US PUBLIC. BOYD AGREED ON THE IMPORTANCE OF TIMING. HE CONTINUED THAT ONCE PRESIDENT FORD IS NOMINATED, THE US SHOULD EXPEDITE NEGOTIATIONS BY SENDING AMB. BUNKER TO PANAMA WITH A FIRM, EVEN IF STILL QUALIFIED, ANSWER ON THE QUESTIONS OF DURATION AND LAND AND WATER USE. HE SAID HE BELIEVED THAT SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS COULD BE MADE BETWEEN THE END OF AUGUST AND NOVEMBER. GOV. SCRANTON PROMISED TO DISCUSS THE MATTER WITH BOTH THE PRESIDENT AND THE SECRETARY. HE SAID, HOWEVER, THAT IT WOULD BE VERY DIFFICULT FOR A CANDIDATE TO GIVE THE IMPRESSION OF FINALIZING A PANAMA CANAL TREATY DURING THE ELECTION.

5. GOV. SCRANTON ALSO TOLD BOYD OF US CONCERN ABOUT POSSIBLE CONFIDENTIAL

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INTRODUCTION OF AN ITEM ON PUERTO RICO IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY. HE WARNED OF THE PROBABLE LINKAGE WHICH WOULD RESULT IN THE MINDS OF THE AMERICAN PUBLIC IF BOTH A PANAMANIAN AND PUERTO RICAN ITEM WERE CONSIDERED BY THE GA. HE SAID THE EFFECT OF THIS WOULD BE THAT THE VAST MAJORITY OF THE AMERICAN PUBLIC, WHO ARE OPPOSED TO ANY INTERFERENCE IN THE QUESTION OF PUERTO RICO, WOULD THEN OPPOSE A NEW CANAL TREATY. HE ASKED BOYD'S HELP IN KEEPING PUERTO RICO OUT OF THE GA AND ON A MODERATE

COURSE AT COLOMBO. BOYD, WHO PROFESSED TO HAVE NO SYMPATHY FOR CUBAN MANEUVERS ON PUERTO RICO, ACKNOWLEDGED THE DANGER OF LINKAGE OF THE TWO ISSUES. HE CONTINUED THROUGH CONVERSATION TO ASK FOR RENEWED NEGOTIATIONS AFTER AUGUST 18, AT PANAMA CITY, WITH A US RESPONSE TO PANAMA'S DESIRES CONCERNING DURATION. SCRANTON OBSERVED THAT AUGUST 18 WAS ALSO A CRITICAL DATE AT COLOMBO AND BOYD SMILINGLY AGREED.

6. COMMENT. WE BELIEVE THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THE QUESTION OF LINKAGE OF PUERTO RICO AND THE PANAMA CANAL ISSUES HAS BEEN MADE, AND IT SEEMED TO HAVE SOME EFFECT. AMBASSADOR SCRANTON MADE A MASTERFUL EFFORT WITH BOYD AND GAVE HIM GOOD ADVICE, "SPEAKING AS THE POLITICIAN I ONCE WAS." HOW MUCH OF IT WENT DOWN WITH BOYD IS HARD TO ESTIMATE; ONLY HIS SUBSEQUENT PERFORMANCE WILL TELL. ILLUECA'S POSITION WAS INTERESTING. HE PAID RAPT ATTENTION TO THE POINTS MADE BY SCRANTON, COMMENTED THAT HE HAD LEARNED A GREAT DEAL FROM THE MEETING, AND TOLD THE GOVERNOR ON DEPARTURE THAT "THIS IS A MEETING I HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR A LONG TIME." HE WILL BE ACCOMPANYING BOYD TO COLOMBO.
BENNETT

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